

**Civil Military Relations and the San Diego Case Study**

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## **Introduction**

In the past, approaches to civil-military relations have focused on federal level institutions. Most scholars prefer to discuss and analyze the military, civilian leadership of the military, and the general public in broad terms, referring to each as “the military,” “the civilian leaders,” or “the people/society” with no delineation between the leaders and their bureaucracies or other lesser players.<sup>1</sup> Such an approach neglects to take into account that circumstances can differ significantly across regions and time. The use of such uncontextualized analytical categories can lead to incomplete analysis.

An area relatively untouched by current scholarship is local case studies. One scholar points out, ““The empirical literature is vast and informative but it has advanced primarily along theoretical lines of analysis laid out by Huntington and Janowitz thirty or forty years ago” (Feaver 1996, 2). Studies in the past have focused on civil-military relations at the federal level. Neither current nor classical theories have addressed local case studies, nor have they mentioned the potential value of such analyses. Civil-military relations occur at more than just the federal level, they occur also at the local level. In fact, this paper will argue that this is where the most important interactions take place, because this is where the voting public formulates its opinions and attitudes towards the military. If it is the intention of the US for the military and society to peacefully coexist, then healthy civil-military relations at the local level are imperative. Contemporary scholars, by focusing in the macro/federal level, have left out a vital piece of the puzzle.

This study addresses the Miramar case in San Diego County. Helicopter noise generated by Marine operations out of Miramar Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) has become a heated issue. Fiery debate and legal proceedings have resulted. This study examines current

scholarship and attempts to connect prior studies at the federal level to the local level. In some ways the methods, conclusions, and prescriptions of federal studies have relevance for the Miramar case. In other ways, civil-military relations at the local level defy traditional approaches to the problem, and demand the attention of scholars separate from the federal level.

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<sup>1</sup> Foster 1999, see also Bacevich 1997, Johnson and Metz, 1996, Feaver 1999, Luttwak 1999.

## **Literature Review**

The study of civil-military relations (CMR) is important for several reasons. First, democracy requires that the military be subordinate to civilian control. In fact, some even argue that anything short of absolute civilian control constitutes an incomplete democracy (Luttwak 1999, 1). It is also essential that the military be powerful enough to protect national interests at home and abroad. So, the military has to be both controllable and powerful. Secondly, fundamental differences between the military and society virtually guarantee that there will always be friction between these two entities. The military is undemocratic, hierarchical, and it cherishes self-denial. US society is democratic, non-hierarchical, and it cherishes the pursuit of self-interests. Because of the different values, norms, and structure, a certain level of friction between the military and society is expected. Constant reassessment of civil-military relations is needed if we hope to maintain the proper relationship for democracy.

Given a number of critical developments in the past 30 years, recent scholarship had found traditional approaches to civil-military relations to be inadequate. Nuclear weapons, the Cold War, and the onset of the Clinton administration have all fundamentally changed the nature of the relationship between society, civilian leadership, and the military. There are no longer distinct roles for the military and civilian leadership, nor is there at present a clear threat to the physical security of the US as there was during the Cold War. These developments have made formulating a clear national defense policy difficult. Such fundamental changes have marked the dawn of a new era in civil-military relations, one not explained adequately by previous theory. Scholars continue to search for new theories and approaches that account for these changes.

This paper outlines the changes in the international environment and within the US politico-military apparatus, addresses the inadequacy of classical theories in accounting for these

changes, and summarizes the central concerns and conclusions of research in the field since the beginning of the Clinton administration. The focus will be on the US case, summarizing how contemporary theories differ in their conception of the problem and their suggestions for improving US civil-military relations.

### **Historical Changes**

Civil-military relations have indeed been transformed, and it is important to recount the historical changes so that it is understood what scholars mean when they refer to them. A clear chain of historical events is what some scholars believe has led to the current crisis in civil-military relations<sup>2</sup> (Feaver 1996, Bacevich 1997, Johnson and Metz 1995, Bland 1999). Up until World War II military professionals remained detached from politics. During World War II, common purpose kept the civil-military relations relatively harmonious. Military leaders gave in to the desires of the president even when they disagreed, and civilian leaders left decisions on grand strategy to military professionals and the Commander in Chief. Both sides still believed that military influence over national policy posed a threat to democratic values.

Event #1: The Development of Nuclear Weapons. With the development of nuclear weapons this pattern changed. Civilians were now intimately involved with formulating grand strategy. It was generally believed that military leaders could not manage such destructive means of violence responsibly, so civilians for the first time infringed on this space traditionally reserved

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that not everyone is convinced that there is a crisis in civil-military relations. Authors Johnson and Metz(1996) and Gibson and Snider(1999) say that the current struggles are a natural result of major shakeups in national defense policy following the end of the Cold War. The struggles were exacerbated when a president without military experience came to office. Because of recent changes, were are seeing a re-balancing of the civil-military relationship, which will just take a little bit more time (Johnson and Metz 1996). Instead of change, what civil-military relations need is simply time to work through the various transformations of the last decade. Gibson and Snider conclude that CMR are not in crisis, and that tensions were expected, understandable, and predictable. CMR have become less troublesome since '93-94, evidence that both sides learned from that turmoil. Political education and job experience is actually beneficial because it promotes "professionalism, competence, and political sophistication" (14). The problem is with the declining education and experience of civilian appointees. More competence on both sides would lead to better discourse and better policy decisions, but certainly there is no cause for alarm.

exclusively for the military. Military leaders were no longer solely in charge of determining when and how to employ the tools of force.

Event #2: Onset of the Cold War. The second historical link in the causal chain was the onset of the Cold War. It fundamentally changed the nature of CMR because it required the integration of military, political, economic, moral, and ideological elements of military power, and no longer was there a clear delineation between military and civilian roles. This was manifested in the various engagements of the Cold War. During conflicts in Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Central Asia new roles and missions were defined for the military and special operations grew in importance within the military community. The traditional mission of the military -- winning large-scale conventional war -- was erased. Vietnam in particular had devastating effects on civil-military relations. Distrust abounded as conflicts arose over rules of engagement (ROE's). Military officials felt constrained and betrayed by the restrictions placed on their operations. Their traditional sphere of autonomy no longer existed. On the other hand, civilian officials did not trust military leaders to take the delicate political situation into account. Vietnam also highlighted the inherent friction between the military and society. Because of mass conscription, society was left with a substantial group of ex-military personnel whose values often clashed with those of society. The troops struggled to re-adjust to societal norms, and society struggled to adjust to the troops. By erasing traditional lines between military and civilian roles, transforming the military institution, and highlighting the inherent conflict between military and societal values, the Cold War permanently changed the face of US civil-military relations.

Event #4: 1986 Gold Water-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act. The fourth link in the causal chain was the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act, which now is hailed as the most important piece of civil-military relations legislation (Johnson and Metz 1999). According to

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some, the increase in the military's political influence was caused in large part by the structural changes brought about by Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986. These changes "accelerated these learning experiences among some of the most talented and aspiring younger military leaders and created new political-military positions at the highest levels of the decision-making process" (Gibson and Snider 1998, 4). It increased the political power of the military by unifying their voice under the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and it decreased civilian power by making the military an integral part of the national defense decision-making process. Now the military could voice its opinions even when civilian officials did not desire it. At times the military has even leaked reservations about civilian decisions to the press, making it difficult for civilian leaders to overrule the military's advice. Because of Goldwater-Nichols, the US is faced with the most politically influential military that it has ever had.

Event #5: The End of the Cold War. The end of the Cold War destroyed the paradigms that had dominated our national defense policy for over 50 years. No longer was there a single enemy for which to prepare. In the absence of a clear threat, leaders questioned the need to maintain a large standing army. This sent the military into survival mode. As a bureaucracy it had to fight for resources and influence to maintain itself. This has led to an expansion of military roles and military involvement in legislative battles over resources and missions—events that were previously thought unacceptable for a military of a democracy (Huntington 1957, Janowitz 1963).

Event #6: The Clinton Administration. The sixth link in this historical chain is the onset of the Clinton administration. There have been several new developments since the president has been in office. First of all, the President no military service experience. He had even been accused of dodging military service and of protesting military action in Vietnam. To make matters worse,

President Clinton's first action as Commander in Chief was to change the military's policy on gays. Military leaders found it difficult to respect their new commander in chief, and this led to a period of particular acrimony in civil-military relations evidenced by off-the-record comments made by uniformed officers about President Clinton (Feaver 1999, 1). For the first time in years, noticeable friction existed between the military and its civilian leaders.

Among other things, this series of changes has led to increased politicization of the military. "One three star general calls the single greatest danger facing the US military today the possibility that a politicized military will stay that way, perhaps growing less and less responsive to civilian control over time" (Ricks 1999, 1). Over the last 50 years this chain of events has changed the face of US civil-military relations. It has exacerbated the conflict between the military and society, and scholars continue to struggle to grasp new complexities created by these historical events.

### **Classical Theory and Its Shortcomings**

Over time, the classical theories of Samuel Huntington and Morris Janowitz have become largely obsolete for explaining trends in civil-military relations and prescribing the correct balance for the civil-military relationship. Their theories were developed at the beginning of the Cold War to deal with the complexities posed by a distinctly bipolar world. As described above, much has changed since then.

Huntington theorized that in order for democracy to sustain a powerful military force without having that force pose a threat to the power of the state, the military should be given relative autonomy within a clearly defined military sphere (Huntington 1957). Huntington called this "objective control." In order for objective control to be effective, the military had to be led by professional military officers, who understood and respected their roles as non-partisan

members of society. The mission of such a force would be to fight and win wars effectively and efficiently when ordered to do so by civilian leaders.

Janowitz (1981), in contrast, argued the military should perform a constabulary role. Efficiency in battle was less important than a commitment to using a minimum amount of force to get the job done, and victory was measured not on the battlefield but by the stabilization of international relations. Rather than being a separate enclave, Janowitz argued that the military had to be closely tied to society so that it could be sensitive to societal norms. This conception is more realistic because it realized the unavoidable politicization of the military, which presents an explicit challenge to the civilian supremacy. The answer to this challenge, according to Janowitz, is greater oversight at more levels, in contrast to Huntington's solution of autonomy.

Both of these theories fail to account for the changes in civil-military relations that have occurred over the last half-century as outlined in the previous section. One scholar criticized classical theories by saying "they are too narrowly conceived and miss critical aspects of the problem, and they are too bound by the culture and national politics of their proponents" (Bland 1999, 1). New theories are attempting to account for new developments in civil-military relations by focusing instead on the relationship between civilian leaders who lack military experience and military leaders who have increased political expertise (Bland 1999, Feaver 1996).

Classical theories have not lost all of their explanatory power. Some argue that American civil-military relations remain focused on the Huntingtonian concepts of power and ideology, and that analysis can continue using these two levels (Gibson and Snider 1998, 2). Dunlap (1996) also advocates a modified version of Huntington's "objective control," arguing that today's military should be narrowly focused on warfighting. On the other hand, it would be

naïve to ignore the fundamental changes that have occurred in civil-military relations in the last decade and to not suggest new theories and frameworks for dealing with these changes.

### **Problems/Solutions**

Classic theorists would argue that both the military and civilian leaders have specific obligations. Huntington said that the military had to remain non-partisan, and civilian leaders had to give them autonomy to train and prepare for combat (Huntington 1957). Janowitz said that the military had to be involved in politics so that it could ascertain the best method of achieving political objectives (Janowitz 1981). Conceptions have changed today. Part of the problem with classical theories is that they assume that it is possible for military and civilian leaders to have specific roles. In response Bland asked, “How are ministers to control the armed forces when they (usually) lack the necessary knowledge and experience to do this effectively?” (5). Certainly the modern relationship between military and civilian leaders is much more dynamic than Huntington and Janowitz realized. To account for this dynamic relationship Bland takes a new institutional approach to formulating a “unified theory” based on an assumption of shared responsibility between civilians and the military (1999).<sup>3</sup> The two in fact become “unified” in his model. Bland says,

The military can describe in some detail the nature of the threat posed by a particular enemy, but only the civilian can decide whether to feel threatened and so how or even whether to respond. The military quantifies the risk; the civilian judges it (4).

Bland argued that we need to change the way we conceptualize civilian control. He argued that civilians do not control the military, they merely direct it. The relationship is not superior-subordinate rather it is based on mutual respect and, according to Bland, shared responsibility.

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<sup>3</sup> Bland calls his approach “new institutionalist” because he recognizes that institutions shape actors in addition to actors shaping institutions. In his approach he discusses the effects of interactions both within and among institutions of civil-military relations.

Bland's approach better encompasses the true nature of the contemporary relationship between the military and society.

Gibson and Snider (1999) observe less parity between civilian and military leaders, noting that greater political expertise of the military has translated into more influence at all levels of policymaking. Their study established a clear correlation between military experience levels in politics and the rise in military influence in the national security decision-making realm. The military has advocated increasing political experience among its officers by placing more junior officers in positions where they can accumulate such experience. Military officers also possess higher levels of education than ever before. By the same token, the national security experience among civilian leaders is decreasing. As a result, the military in recent years has been much more successful in influencing policy outcomes, which is construed by Gibson and Snider as a loss of civilian control (1999). Their solution is to increase the education and experience levels among civilians. Education and experience among the military is not detrimental, because it allows the military to better understand its role in democracy and the international implications of its actions abroad.

In addition to identifying shortcomings among the civilian leadership, scholars such as Foster (1999) criticize how the armed forces have conducted themselves. Scholars in this category point to a long list of current military blunders and embarrassments, from sexual scandals to inefficiency and sheer neglect of duty.<sup>4</sup> Such events signal what Foster calls a "military establishment which is seriously diseased" (2). Specifically, the military has become "an institution that has lost its identity, that no longer has confidence in or respect for those it is supposed to serve" (5). Blame is not restricted to only the military. Foster and others also point

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<sup>4</sup> Foster cites various instances of sexual misconduct, intelligence and equipment failures, and abuse of military resources among other things (Foster 1999, 1-2).

out that as the draft-era leadership has died off, civilian leaders increasingly lack military experience. This has made the military more powerful politically in relation to civilians (Gibson and Snider 1999; Foster 1999, 5). This has also made it difficult for civilian leadership to attain credibility within military circles, a key element for effective civilian control (Foster 5). Foster suggests that each party to civil-military relations—the military, civilian leadership, and the people—has to meet each other’s expectations for CMR to improve.<sup>5</sup> The first steps are for the military to adjust its attitudes towards its civilian leadership, for the leadership to increase its competence, and for the people to take interest in civil-military relations.

Still others place blame squarely on the shoulders of the civilian leadership. In his 1992 article, Dunlap blames “massive diversion of military forces to civilian uses, the monolithic unification of the armed forces, and the insularity of the military community” (Dunlap 1). These phenomena were a reflection of trends prevalent in the early 90’s: the economy was struggling, domestic problems abounded (crime, drugs, health care), and yet the military was enjoying one of its greatest waves of popularity in the wake of its decisive Persian Gulf victory. Our inefficient government was unsuited and unable to address these crises, and so the public shifted its support to the military and to military leadership instead, resulting in a military coup.

Dunlap’s later work reflected some of the changes that had occurred over the course of the decade. Along with the continuance of non-traditional taskings for the military (drug interdiction, public works, disaster relief, humanitarian and peacekeeping missions abroad), the problems in CMR now included over-politicization of the military, new measures of success for the military, fundamental differences between the military and society, and a lack of candor on

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<sup>5</sup> Foster argues that the President expects operational competence, sound advice, unquestioning obedience, and political sensitivity from the military. The military in return expects executive competence, clear strategic guidance, appreciation and support, and sufficient political acumen to get things done properly and effectively. From the

both sides (Dunlap 1996). Dunlap argues that the military is victimized by civilian policymakers and forced into these roles against its will. Such missions cloud the military's primary mission of fighting and winning wars. Training for these missions and time spent executing them takes away from time and resources that could be spent in training and readiness for combat (Dunlap 1996). Because Dunlap represents the military as the victim, his solutions center on changing the actions of civilian leaders rather than the actions of the military.<sup>6</sup> Primarily they involve changes in the way that civilian leaders manage the military force, suggesting that changes in civilian leadership are key to improving civil-military relations.

### **Conclusion**

The US has been blessed with relatively harmonious civil-military relations throughout its history. Instances of open conflict between the military and government are few. We should not, however, be disenchanted by that harmony. Today we are faced with new challenges brought about by the events of history and changes in the modern environment. The need for new theories and insights into the problems that face civil-military relations in the US is as great now as it ever has been.

Historical circumstances are largely to blame for the current crisis. Scholars have attempted to simplify the vast and complex issues associated with the current crisis by approaching it from an institutional standpoint and limiting their analyses to the federal level. They have done so at the cost of local case studies, which may in fact shed more insight into the

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people, the military expects support and civil commitment and public order. The people in return expect operational competence and advice as well as strict political neutrality.

<sup>6</sup> Dunlap's suggestions include: demand that the armed forces focus exclusively on indisputably military duties; avoid tasking the military with solving non-military dimensions of national security and stop giving them budget dollars for non-military tasks such as anti-narcotics; cede more dollars to agencies who address paramilitary problems that the armed forces are presently tasked with; eliminate unnecessary guard and reserve units; educate the public on the sophisticated training requirements for modern warfare; avoid unifying the armed forces; balance out sources of professional military officers; orient recruiting towards all echelons of society, and encourage the military to assimilate into civilian communities rather than improving on-base living facilities (Dunlap 1992).

delicate relationship between society and the military. The following analysis of the San Diego case will tie together the macro-level trends and problems identified in the literature with specific events as they have unfolded in San Diego at Miramar Marine Corps Air Station.

### **Case Analysis**

In 1995, in response to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission's decision to close Marine Corps air stations at Tustin and El Torro, over 100 choppers came to San Diego. This has created a controversy in large part because Miramar Marine Corps Air Station, formerly Miramar Naval Air Station, is at the heart of San Diego County activity. It is surrounded on all sides by freeways, residential and commercial areas, and schools. When Miramar was built in the 1940's, this area north of downtown San Diego was essentially uninhabited. Over time, however, urban sprawl engulfed Miramar. Complaints and concerns about noise and the dangers posed to communities by around-the-clock operations mounted, and by the mid 90's the Navy was glad to leave.<sup>7</sup> The Marines, badly in need of an affordable base for air operations, felt fortunate to inherit Miramar. The price was affordable, and it seemed a perfect location, seated centrally between the Marine Corps air station in Yuma, Arizona and Twentynine Palms Marine base in the Mojave Desert, and also close to Camp Pendleton in northern San Diego. The noise issues were initially put aside by local government leaders in light of the boost the Marines would bring to the ailing San Diego economy. As the economy has recovered and as noise concerns have mounted, the warm welcome has turned into the cold shoulder.

Contrary to the traditional scholarly focus on civil-military relations at the macro or federal level, the above case represents a problem at the local level. At first glance this may seem to be a simple problem of the Marines refusing to respond to civilian control. The problem, unfortunately, is no quite so simple. The policy process has been complicated by several factors. First, the people have spoken through all sorts of mediums, including formal complaint channels, through local policymakers, and the newspaper opinion columns, and the

responses vary greatly. Some feel that we should grant the local Marines the autonomy that Huntington speaks of so that they can prepare and train for war. Others feel that the Marines and the people of San Diego can no longer peacefully coexist, and that the Marines should pack their bags. Public opinion is not only scattered, it is illogical. Those most impacted by noise have complained the least, and communities outside of flight paths have logged some of the most significant numbers of complaints. The military for its part has argued that it has done everything it can within reason. Actual evidence shows that they have sidestepped the issue and refused to make broad changes to appease opponents unless ordered to do so by court mandate. The Marines' refusal to cooperate has frustrated opposition groups and bred distrust. Further complicating matters is the fact that each interested party has constructed to problem to its own benefit. This summary will detail the response of the public as stated in articles and letters to the San Diego Union Tribune and the subsequent response of the Marine Corps attained through the San Diego Union Tribune and through interviews with the Miramar MCAS public affairs staff.

### **The Public**

Public opinion prior to the Marines' move to San Diego was varied, and their differing views were well documented by the Union Tribune. Some sensed that the presence of numerous helicopters would have negative impacts on the local community. Councilwoman Susan Callery said, "This will have a terrible impact on our community."<sup>8</sup> The La Jolla Shores Association said it believed that helicopter noise would "disrupt the neighborhood and hurt tourism on the area's beaches."<sup>9</sup> One resident also expressed concern that the Marines would "promise the moon and

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<sup>7</sup> George Mitchell. "Why Miramar Won't Work for Marine Air Operations Either." San Diego Union Tribune. October 26 1995, pB-11.

<sup>8</sup> All quotes taken from the Union Tribune.

<sup>9</sup> "Miramar Attributes Rise in Noise to Transition." March 2, 1995.

then things will go downhill."<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, most residents felt positively about the presence of the Marines. One commented after observing the noise tests that the Marines ran prior to the move that, "The lawn mowers were making more noise."<sup>11</sup> Really, the most positive feedback came from the majority of local policy makers who were looking for a boost to the economy at a time when San Diego was struggling through a recession.

The debate became more heated as the Marines settled in and noise and safety issues began to mount. Sentiment ranged from those who support the Marines and their training activities to those who felt the Marines and the people of San Diego could never peacefully co-exist. Richard Ludwig, a resident who lives in the City's southern section, said, "This is definitely inappropriate." Bob Lewis of Torrey Pines said, "This isn't a matter of civilian vs. military. It's a matter of noise."<sup>12</sup> One resident from Fallbrook commented that the flagrant disregard by the Marines had turned her neighborhood into a warzone.<sup>13</sup> A Poway resident commented, "I hate to see my property value lowered because my house is under the flight path."<sup>14</sup> Another resident characterized the decision to move the helicopters to Miramar as "terribly flawed" and said that "There is no solution that involves continuing the military presence at Miramar."<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand people have said, "It's not a problem for me" and "It's not a tenth as bad as people think."<sup>16</sup> More specifically, some residents noted that, "Occasionally hearing these helicopters fly over is a cheap price to pay for our safety and security."<sup>17</sup> One resident certainly summed up the opinion of the military when he said, "When Miramar was built, it was in the

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<sup>10</sup> "Miramar Base to Become Noisier." Oct 25, 1995.

<sup>11</sup> "Delegation Finds Chopper Noise Tolerable." Nov 28, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> "Crowd Roars, Marines Listen." Oct 27, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> "Marines Get Earful Over Their Choppers." Dec 2, 1995.

<sup>14</sup> "Poway Still Skeptical of Helicopters." Dec 20, 1995.

<sup>15</sup> "War on Ground Over Marine Copters." Feb 12, 1999.

<sup>16</sup> "Delegation Finds Chopper Noise Tolerable." Nov 28, 1995.

middle of an uninhabited space. The people who moved nearby are not the military's fault."<sup>18</sup>

Certainly one could ascertain that there is considerable support as well as opposition for helicopter operations as they stand today.

Some of the more constructive comments identify specific areas of concern and offer feasible solutions. For instance, one resident said, "If (the Marines) fly helicopters at night it will wake us up."<sup>19</sup> Another resident at least gives the military some options when he says, "Either find another way to go, or fly higher."<sup>20</sup> Another resident reiterates this concern over low flight levels when he says, "There is no legitimate reason for Marine Corps helicopters to overfly areas of Poway or any other community at low altitudes, miles away from Miramar's active runways."<sup>21</sup> Other comments reflect similar rationality and a desire to work together:

Nobody questions the the need to maintain military capability and preparedness. What lots of San Diego County residents object to is (1) that the Marine Corps saw fit to transfer CH-46 and CH-53 helicopter squadrons to Miramar for "cost-saving reasons," knowing full well that noise, pollution, and safety would become issues of great controversy, and (2) that helicopter "training missions" would take place over heavily populated residential areas.<sup>22</sup>

Rather than attacking civilians who are impacted by these flights it would be refreshing if the Marine Corps would find, and adhere to, routes that overfly less populated areas, even if it would take a little more fuel and time to do so.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the general lack of common purpose among residents, there have been instances where specific problems have been outlined and feasible solutions offered.

Other comments merely reflect a desire to freely voice concerns, and a desire for the military to address those concerns. One resident asks, "Shouldn't we be able to question and complain when the military upper echelon makes decisions that affect our peacetime lives

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<sup>17</sup> "Marine Helicopter Ruckus Stirs Tempers, Patriotism." Feb 10, 1999.

<sup>18</sup> "War on Ground Over marine Copters." Feb 12, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> "Weather Clouds Marine Demonstration Flights." Dec. 8, 1995.

<sup>20</sup> "Crowd Roars, Marines Listen." Oct 27, 1995.

<sup>21</sup> "Letters to the Editor. " Oct 30, 1995.

<sup>22</sup> "Marine Helicopter Ruckus Stirs Tempers, Patriotism." Feb 10, 1999.

negatively?"<sup>24</sup> Another resident says of the Marines, "It is their duty to understand the frustrations of the citizenry and do what they can to ameliorate them, or at least respond to them in a gentlemanly way."<sup>25</sup> Some citizens are merely asking for a chance to voice their concerns and to have their questions answered.

One group that would logically support Marine operations would be retired military personnel. Surprisingly, this is not the case. Their comments covered the entire spectrum of opinion also. Jinx McCain, a retired Marine, said he likes the sound of helicopters.<sup>26</sup> Major General (Ret.) Richard M. Cooke, USMC, now a resident of Vista said, "I do wonder, though, when I read or hear of complaints of the residents, what they were doing in 1993 when the BRAC held hearings in San Diego? They should have voiced their objections then. It's a little late now."<sup>27</sup> In contrast to these comments, former military helicopter pilot Roy Billings criticized the plan for Marine helicopters because it passed over heavily populated areas.<sup>28</sup> Another retired serviceman had this to say:

"I put 27 rewarding years in the navy defending this country, including three combat tours in Vietnam... We trained at remote offshore islands, in the desert, in the mountains and at sea -- not only because of the inherent dangers in our mission training but also out of concern for the rights and privacy of civilians."<sup>29</sup>

It is obvious that there is considerable disagreement on the issue, even within the retired military community.

One factor that significantly complicates the case analysis is that support and opposition to military operations among various groups defies conventional logic. An obvious reason for

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> "War on Ground Over Marine Copters." Feb 12, 1999.

<sup>26</sup> "Marines Get Earful Over Their Choppers." Dec 2, 1995.

<sup>27</sup> "War on Ground Over Marine Copters." Feb 12, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> "Crowd Roars, Marines Listen." Oct 27, 1995.

<sup>29</sup> "War on Ground Over Marine Copters." Feb 12, 1999.

support of Marine operations would come from people not affected by those operations—i.e: people whose homes are not beneath training routes, nor close enough to be bothered by the noise. Surprisingly the data does not support this. Maps of training routes and complaint statistics obtained from the MARCH web page indicate that some of the areas most affected by noise are complaining the least.<sup>30</sup> For instance, in the month of March Mira Mesa only logged one complaint. Mira Mesa is the area closest to Miramar, and people there bear the full brunt of the noise every time a chopper takes off or lands regardless of which route that helicopter takes. Rancho Bernardo logged 643 complaints in the same month, and it is only affected by choppers flying the I-15 route. Flights down this route have been decreased substantially in recent months, and choppers fly at 1600' above the ground. There could be many reasons for this disparity. Rancho Bernardo is a notoriously wealthy and organized community. They would possess the time and resources to file more complaints. Mira Mesa, on the other hand, is home to many lower-middle-class minorities, including a substantial Filipino population. They may not have the time and resources to log complaints even if they are disturbed more often. Also, they may be more tolerant knowing that they chose to settle next to a major base. They may also be desensitized to the noise since they hear it more often. A final factor could be that many own businesses there and depend on the patronage of the military, and are thus hesitant to complain about the noise problem.

Further coloring public opinion is the fact that public concerns are not always based objectively on the actions of the military, but rather on peoples' conceptions of the military itself. The following quotes are indicative of this.

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<sup>30</sup> [www.stopchoppers.org](http://www.stopchoppers.org). Accessed 25 April 2000. Statistics and maps included in Appendix A. Move Against Relocating Choppers Here (MARCH) is a non-profit public benefit corporation dedicated to minimizing the impacts of Miramar-based helicopters. Other than local government, MARCH represents one of the few channels for conglomerating public interest in regards to this issue.

Reassurances that the copters would adhere to altitudes and routes designed to minimize problems are meaningless. Pilots, military or civilian, are an independent breed who on occasion tend to wink at 'regulations.'<sup>31</sup>

We know that they are performing sacrifices to protect us where they are needed, but they also need to be considerate neighbors of the residents they disrupt with their immature, testosterone-fueled behavior.<sup>32</sup>

Such comments are indicative of a deeper problem—a general disdain and distrust of the military institution. This problem will be addressed in greater detail in the following section. The important point to make here is that these types of comments do not originate from mere dissatisfaction of noise levels or safety issues. They are based on personal stereotypes of the military establishment in general.

### **The Military**

The Marines have argued that they have tried to do everything that they can to address and alleviate the complaints of the populace within reason. The Marine Corps has voiced its concern over local area relations. General James Jones, the highest-ranking Marine and Commandant of the Marine Corps, recently stated,

"The Marine Corps is inextricably linked to American society. We exist to protect the larger community which, in return nurtures and sustains us. By maintaining a sound and healthy relationship with the society we serve, we will build confidence in our institution and support for our efforts."

From this statement one could draw that the marines are genuinely concerned with community relations. So, what has their strategy been for dealing with public concerns?<sup>33</sup> Its routes were specifically designed to minimize impacts, and it averages only three missions per night after 2300 local time.<sup>34</sup> It has made minor adjustments in training schedules, and is presently considering its first change in training routes. It is important to note that the consideration of

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<sup>31</sup> "Marine Helicopter Ruckus Stirs Tempers, Patriotism." Feb 10, 1999.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Phone interview with public affairs official, Staff Sergeant Kolt, on 29 November 1999.

alternate routes only came in response to a court order that followed a court battle with local groups. The Marines have also stepped up their efforts to proactively seek to hear the concerns of the public by establishing an Office of Community Plans and Liaison, an organization specifically tasked with visiting town council meetings and other public forums to answer questions and educate the populace on Marine Corps activities. A formal complaint hotline has also been established. When complaints are phoned in, an actual pilot is waiting on the other line to take down specific information. Hotline duty is rotated among the Marine pilots. Once the information is recorded, the pilot then follows up on it to see that helicopters were complying with set routes and predetermined altitudes. In general, the Marines feel that these steps have been adequate for addressing public concern.

However, according to one official, Marine strategy is reactive rather than proactive.<sup>35</sup> The military has no desire to meet organizations like MARCH on its own turf. If MARCH releases a statement to the papers, then Miramar officials may also release a statement. The Marines do not initiate debates or contacts with disgruntled civilians. It tries to keep the discourse on a positive note by emphasizing the importance of training operations. It has in recent times muffled the voice of MARCH by invoking a clause from a legal settlement, which allows either side to censor the press releases of the other. On one hand, this action is reactive because the Marines are merely reacting to press releases that could mar the Marines' public image. On the other hand, this is a proactive move by the Marines to silence one of the primary opposition groups.

The Marines also argue that the problem is largely out of its hands. They allege that the number of complaints ebbs and flows with factors outside of military control, such as weather.

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<sup>34</sup> Telephone interview.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

When a fog bank rolls in the Marines are forced to revert to instrument routes and approaches. This results in lower flying, more noise, and more complaints. Also, offshore carrier aircraft may have to make emergency landings at Miramar due to mechanical difficulties. This too results in more complaints. Massive training operations are normally reserved for less-populated locations, but if the Marines are gearing up for an actual operation, frequency of flights will increase over San Diego also. The Marines have also blamed civilian traffic controllers who direct the aircraft after they leave the Miramar vicinity. According to one source, "The problem lies with the civilian air traffic controllers who tell departing jets to fly a direct route after taking off. That route sends the jets over more homes." Exact numbers on how often these types of cases occur are unavailable. In essence, the military claims that complaint levels in large part a result of uncontrollable factors.

The military has made several encouraging promises over the years. Following a series of studies done in 1995, Marine officials said, "We're going to make adjustments to minimize the impacts." Even the highest-ranking Marine in the Corps, General Charles C. Krulak, was said to have been keeping an eye on the issue.<sup>36</sup> "We're very concerned about the impacts on our neighbors," a base spokesman said.<sup>37</sup> The military has even hinted at times that it is considering altering routes and schedules.<sup>38</sup> A 1995 Environmental Impact Statement said that Marines could fly as low as 1000 feet. The marines reportedly chose to fly higher to minimize noise problems. "We can always fly low, but we don't want to... We want to be good neighbors," a base spokesman said.<sup>39</sup> It seems from these comments that the Marines are genuinely concerned

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<sup>36</sup> "Nighttime Study is an Eye Opener." Oct 27, 1995.

<sup>37</sup> "Miramar Base to Become Noisier." Oct 25, 1995.

<sup>38</sup> "Noisy Neighbors: Marines Response to Complaints is Discouraging." Oct 21, 1995.

<sup>39</sup> "Weather Clouds Marine Demonstration Flights." Dec. 8, 1995.

with the impacts its operations are having. Despite these promises, the Marines continue to conduct business as usual unless ordered to do otherwise.

The views expressed by the public and the military reflect different conceptions of the problems posed by helicopter operations over greater San Diego. The argumentative discourse, which is furthered muddled by the individual interests of each of the actors, in no way lends itself to rational policymaking. As with most policy problems, the actors have complicated the policy process by constructing the problem in different ways. This makes it difficult to formulate a solution that is politically feasible and fair to both sides. Despite the difficulty of this task, this remains that goal of this project. The paper will now turn to interpretation of the problem using existing theoretical frameworks and the proffering and analyzing of some possible solutions.

### Analysis of Problems and Alternative Solutions

The purpose of this section is to point out three specific problem areas in the Miramar case and to assess some alternative solutions.

*Problem #1: Public Opinion.* Certain themes resound in the above summary. The first is the general breakdown in trust and common purpose. Perceived unresponsiveness to civilian control is in part to blame. However, as the case analysis shows, the military's reluctance to respond organized opposition has developed in part because it has been impossible for it to get a true bearing on the public's position. Before anything can be accomplished in San Diego, the public needs to speak as a unified body. It is unlikely that communities will agree on the problem because they are each affected differently. However, there are some tools at policymakers' disposal, which could gauge the overall feelings of residents in the area. For instance, a stratified random sample could be created and a short telephone survey could be administered. The issue could also be placed on the ballot during the next general election. These types of measures could be used to measure whether or not the public felt the Marines should significantly alter their operations in San Diego. Such statistics, if collected by a non-partisan company, could add some rationality to the debate.

*Problem #2: Neopraetorianism.* Military unresponsiveness could also be the product of a military that believes itself to be morally superior to the public and which looks on public concern with disdain. Dunlap calls this "neopraetorianism," and he specifically defines it as "when the armed forces perceive themselves not only as the protectors of what is right in civil society but also as the self appointed, unelected makers and implementers of the same."<sup>40</sup> Two scholarly studies, one by Harvard and one by a Naval War College student, also warned that the military had an "increasingly jaundiced view of civilians" and a "narcissistic assessment of

itself.”<sup>41</sup> According to Dunlap, Neopraetorianism is continually reinforced by the military’s focus on morality and the idyllic life lived on its bases. Certainly at least a portion of the San Diego population has voiced concerns over what they perceive to be an attitude of superiority among military personnel. Letters to the editor of the San Diego Union Tribune have expressed the following:

I get the feeling that many in the military feel that the world owes them a living, that we should respect them because they are the ones chosen to protect our country. Each time they are questioned, they want us to feel that they are making great sacrifices when they storm the beaches of San Diego on a Saturday morning.<sup>42</sup>

The attitude of the Marine Corps leadership is that anyone daring to question the necessity of flying tens of thousands of military helicopter flights over heavily populated communities must be beaten into silence with accusations of selfish lack of appreciation for the altruistic sacrifices of our armed forces.<sup>43</sup>

Whether or not Marines actually display such behavior is irrelevant. The important note to make is that people perceive the Marines as having neopraetorian attitudes, and this in itself is damaging to civil-military relations.

*Problem #3: Politicization of the Military.* Over-politicization could also be a reason for the lack of action by the military. Why act when no one is forcing you to do so? The lack of action on the part of the Marines could be explained by the fact that they have recruited the support of local Congresspeople. Direct evidence of this is scant, but for whatever reason local Congresspeople have conveniently avoided the issue. Of all of the San Diego Union Tribune articles printed on the subject in 1995, 1999, and 2000, federal policymakers have only been mentioned twice. This does not necessarily mean that federal leaders have been dormant on this issue, but one would think that they would be mentioned or quoted in the paper if they had been

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<sup>40</sup> Dunlap 7.

<sup>41</sup> Dunlap 7.

<sup>42</sup> "War on Ground Over Marine Copters." Feb 12, 1999.

<sup>43</sup> Marine Helicopter Ruckus Stirs Tempers, Patriotism." Feb 10, 1999.

actively involved in the debate. The apparent lack of interest of federal policymakers is significant because these are the people that can put pressure directly on the Marine Corps leadership in the Pentagon. Local Marine officials are reluctant to change and limited in what they can do. The decision to move the choppers to Miramar came from higher levels of Marine Corps leadership, and they are the ones who can order changes in chopper basing or changes in training routes and schedules. As it stands the Marines have shown a general lack of interest in working with local organizations and city leaders, knowing full well that local leaders and grassroots opposition can have little direct influence on Marine Corps actions. The discourse on politicization here is purely hypothetical since there is a lack of concrete evidence.

*Solution #1: Quantify the Military's Political Influence.* Politicization is an elusive issue, because it is difficult to quantify what goes on behind the scenes. It should be noted though that politicization has been an equally elusive issue at the federal level. Perhaps scholarly work done in quantifying politicization at the federal could be repeated at the local level. First, one could simply match preferences with outcomes. What has the military's preferences been, and what have the preferences of the local leadership been? Whose preferences have won out? This approach assumes many things. First, it assumes that preferences differ. In many respects, the military and the public have the same goal—they both want a Marine Corps that is capable of fighting and winning wars. It could be difficult to determine who has “won” in regards to having their preferences met between the military and local leaders. Secondly, it assumes that preferences, especially in regards to civilian leaders, can be conglomerated. This is exceedingly problematic, because in the past local leaders have had a difficult time agreeing on the issue. City leaders have taken the most active role in fighting Marine intrusion, while federal leaders have preferred to stay out of the debate. Many of these problems could be overcome by

employing Gibson and Snider's method, which focused on comparing influence of key civilian and military policymakers based on political job experience, combat experience, and education. Such a study could give scholars a better idea of how influential military leaders are in local politics.

*Solution #2: Dunlap's New American Model.* Dunlap's solution to neopraetorianism and politicization is the New American Model of Civil-Military Relations, which focuses on process and clearly delineated rules. Most importantly, the military must make its thought and action plain to society. Dunlap argues that in the 90's and especially during the Gulf War the military capitalized on society's negative view of the press by manipulating it for its own purposes.<sup>44</sup> This has been reflected in local San Diego also. The press has been banned from Miramar, and the Marines only speak to the press through carefully composed press releases. Most recently, the military has prevented MARCH from releasing information to the public.<sup>45</sup> Dunlap argues that "a vibrant, knowledgeable, and inquisitive press is a vital safeguard of civilian control."<sup>46</sup> The military's actions in San Diego have impeded the development of this role for the media.

Another component of the New American Model is candor, which Dunlap argues is at the root of transparency and can greatly improve civil-military relations. Its use, however, must be tempered by several factors. First, it must be used with "common sense, sound judgment, self-discipline, loyalty, and other traits."<sup>47</sup> Within the confines of private government councils there should be minimal concerns about political correctness, because it "replaces sound, apolitical judgment with opportunistic and often self-serving pandering to popular fashion."<sup>48</sup> Candor also requires a keen sense of accountability on the part of military officers, because in the past there

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<sup>44</sup> Dunlap 9.

<sup>45</sup> San Diego Union Tribune. "Marines Muzzle Copter Comments." March 17, 2000. P B-1.

<sup>46</sup> Dunlap 10.

<sup>47</sup> Dunlap 11.

has been a tendency for them to pass the responsibility for failure off to others.<sup>49</sup> Accountability must be ensured by a reformed military justice system that punishes most severely those that try to pass responsibility off to others rather than those who try their best and fail. Improving candor within both the military and among the public could perhaps improve the relations in San Diego.

One area where San Diego has excelled according to Dunlap is by minimizing the extent to which military personnel and their families are isolated from society by living on base. Because of limited space on base, most military housing communities are located within civilian neighborhoods.<sup>50</sup> This helps to overcome the military's insularity from the general populace. By living off base within regular civilian communities, military members and their families become more integrated with society. According to Dunlap, this is one simple way to decrease suspicion and misunderstanding between the military and the general populace.

*Solution #3: Develop Trust.* A prerequisite to the candor that Dunlap advocates is trust between the military, the press, and society (to include both the general populace and civilian leaders). For the military to speak candidly to the press and to society, it must trust them to accept their views and make wise decisions. Gregory D. Foster argues that trust depends on each party to the triad of civil-military relations—the military, the people, and civilian officials—meeting each other's expectations. Civilian officials expect competence, sound advice, unquestioning obedience, and political sensitivity from the military. The military in return expects executive competence, clear strategic guidance, appreciation and support, and sufficient political acumen to get things done. From the people the military expects support, civil commitment, and public order. The people, in addition to the competence and sound advice that leaders expect, ask for

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<sup>48</sup> Dunlap 11.

<sup>49</sup> Dunlap 11.

<sup>50</sup> There are 23 military housing communities located off base in San Diego county.

political neutrality from the military.<sup>51</sup> Foster argues that these expectations have not been met in recent years, and the result has been “alienation, distrust, disunity-and ultimately, strategic debilitation.”<sup>52</sup>

One of these expectations has relevance for the San Diego case--the military's expectation of appreciation and public support from the people. A portion of the San Diego population has become callous to the presence of the Marines helicopters here in San Diego. Public dissatisfaction of the noise levels has manifested itself in thousands of official complaints, legal proceedings, and organized attempts to alter Marine training routes and schedules and remove the helicopters altogether. Distrust has marked the Marine response. They are hesitant to respond to disgruntled civilians, they limit access to the base, and as mentioned before they have censored the press releases of organized opposition.

*Solution #4: Shared Responsibility.* Bland's model of Shared Responsibility also has relevance for neopraetorianism and politicization. His model is based on regime theory, emphasizes the collaborative rather than the conflictual nature of relationships between actors. Collaborative relationships, such as civil-military relations, are based on a shared set of values passed down from generation to generation. When this rules-based equilibrium is upset, significant turmoil can result. On a larger scale this often takes the form of military coup, but on a local scale in liberal democracies it results in public uproar, noticeable friction, and a struggle for the power to influence outcomes. It is a state of war that exists within the legal framework of our country. The military is naturally in an advantaged position, because it has no obligation to respond to local leaders since it is under federal direction. City leaders and organized opponents such as MARCH use the press as much as possible, and struggle behind the scenes with the military for

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<sup>51</sup> Foster 2-4.

<sup>52</sup> Foster 6.

the support of local congressional representatives. According to Bland, the struggle will continue until new norms are established which are acceptable to both sides. This equilibrium may come in the form of new routes for Marine helicopters. The recent reduction in flights along the I-15 corridor reportedly resulted in a dramatic reduction in complaints, indicating that policymakers may be one step closer to establishing equilibrium. However, even the establishment of new routes as many have suggested is a problematic solution. Determining the routes that Marine helicopters will fly is a process of resource allocation. Routes determine who is punished with irritating noise. No one wants to be singled out for this burden, and tendency is to confer it to communities that are less able to conglomerate political opposition.

*Solution #5: Use the FAA as an Intermediary.* Councilman Byron Wear made one suggestion which would seem to appeal to most theorists and even fits into the framework of much of the literature. He offered that the Federal Aviation Administration be tasked with establishing helicopter routes and handling complaints. He is quoted as saying, "It's a disservice to the Marines to dump this on them."<sup>53</sup> The FAA knows what aircraft are in the air and are in a better position to respond to complaints. They also have an office specifically tasked with receiving noise complaints. If a civilian pilots are found guilty of violating noise abatement procedures they can be punished with formal rebuke or even having their licenses suspended. Military pilots should have similar consequences, enforced by the Marine Corps leadership rather than the FAA. This solution has several advantages. First, it could relieve the Marines from having to waste valuable resources and personnel on the problem. The FAA could more easily accomplish its task of managing the airspace. More importantly, it would remove the warfighters from the political process so that they could focus on fighting the enemy rather than fighting with policymakers and society about such issues.

## Conclusion

In many ways the Miramar problem does resemble larger problems at the federal level. For starters, the problem at the local level can be defined by using similar terms and concepts. Secondly, many of the solutions suggested for the federal level, such as methods for quantifying politicization and general theories for improving civil-military relations such as Dunlap's, Foster's, and Bland's, have relevance at the local level. On the other hand, the problem at the local level is unique. It is difficult to apply many of the macro-level solutions to the local level, and some of the best suggestions for improving CMR, such as Byron Wear's recommendation, come from local policymakers and not from scholarly theory. This is significant, because it indicates that local case studies can add important contributions to existing scholarship in this area. If nothing else, this brief analysis of the contemporary literature on civil-military relations and its application to the San Diego case highlights the need for more local case studies.

The analysis presented here is far from comprehensive. First, there is a vast body of civil-military relations literature that remains to be covered. Secondly, virtually all of the case information presented in this paper was obtained from biased sources—the San Diego Union Tribune and the Miramar public affairs staff. Real data needs to be collected on public opinion and on Marine Corps actions. Marine Corps and civilian policymakers should be questioned, and public opinion should be quantified. The assumptions of this paper should be vigorously questioned and tested, and new theories for improving civil-military relations in San Diego should be composed. Then the process of re-evaluation should start all over again. Like most policy problems, civil-military relations is not an idle issue that can be solved and then left alone forever. New developments occur every day, and constant reassessment is necessary to maintain

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<sup>53</sup> San Diego Union Tribune. 18 Jan 200, pp B-3:1,7; B1-2.

the proper balance for democracy. This project represents one very simple cycle of the policy process. The cycle must continue if we hope to improve civil-military relations in the future.

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